BIRTH-CONTROL

THE RIGHT WAY AND THE WRONG WAY

BY
M. K. GANDHI
Compiled by
R. K. PRABHU

NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Readers of Gandhian literature will have already seen Gandhiji's book *Panchayat Raj*, compiled by Shri R. K. Prabhu. As we said in our note therein, Shri Prabhu has submitted to us for publication a few more titles of topical interest. This on birth-control is one of them which is being released now, to be followed by a few more as and when they are ready.

The question of birth-control or 'family planning' as it is being styled now was seriously probed by Gandhiji. He had written often on it, all this was collected in book form and is available under the name *Self-restraint v. Self-indulgence*. He admitted the need of self-control, but gave us a stern warning that birth-control by artificial means will lead to moral bankruptcy and decadence of our people. Today when Governments in India seem to be in a hurry to control birth-rate in India in all ways material science may suggest, it is well to be reminded, as this book will very well do, that means vis-a-vis desirable ends very much matter here also, — perhaps more so in such a vital subject like the relation of the sexes. The book being presented now deals with it from various points of view. We hope it will be welcome to readers as a timely publication on a very vital question agitating us at present.

20-2-1959

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	PUBLISHERS' NOTE	iii
1.	BIRTH-CONTROL	3
2.	THE USE OF CONTRACEPTIVES	5
3.	THE NECESSITY OF CONTINENCE	7
4.	THE LAW OF LIFE	9
5.	THE RIGHT WAY	12
6.	THREE STEPS TO BRAHMACHARYA	13
7.	BRAHMACHARYA NOT IMPOSSIBLE OF ATTAINMENT	15
8.	MARRIAGE A SACRAMENT	17
9.	FOR WOMEN REFORMERS	19
10.	MARRIED BRAHMACHARYA	23
11.	UNWANTED MOTHERHOOD	25
12.	WOMEN MUST LEARN TO SAY "NO"	26
13.	MODERN YOUTH	28
14.	HEADING FOR PROMISCUITY	31
15.	CONSERVATION OF VITAL ENERGY	32
16.	SOUL'S CAPACITY FOR SELF-CONTROL	33
17.	THE MEDICAL PROFESSION	35
18.	SEX EDUCATION	36
19.	"TOWARDS MORAL BANKRUPTCY"	39
20.	THE COMMON BED	44
21.	BOGEY OF OVER-POPULATION	47
22.	THREE BIRTH-CONTROL ENTHUSIASTS	49

BIRTH-CONTROL

THE RIGHT WAY AND THE WRONG WAY

TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

M. K. Gandhi

Harijan, 29-4-'33 p. 2

CHAPTER 1

BIRTH-CONTROL

It is not without the greatest hesitation and reluctance that I approach this subject. The question of using artificial methods for birth-control has been referred to me by correspondents ever since my return to India. Though I have answered them personally, I have never hitherto dealt with the subject publicly. My attention was drawn to the subject, now thirty-five years ago, when I was a student in England. There was then a hot controversy raging between a purist who would not countenance anything but natural means and a doctor who advocated artificial means. It was at that early time in my life that I became, after leanings for a brief period towards artificial means, a convinced opponent of them. I now observe that in some Hindi papers the methods are described in a revoltingly open manner which shocks one's sense of decency. I observe, too, that one writer does not hesitate to cite my name as among the supporters of artificial methods of birth-control. I cannot recall a single occasion when I spoke or wrote in favour of such methods. I have seen also two distinguished names having been used in support. I hesitate to publish them without reference to their owners.

There can be no two opinions about the necessity of birth-control. But the only method handed down from ages past is self-control or *Brahmacharya*. It is an infallible sovereign remedy doing good to those who practise it. And medical men will earn the gratitude of mankind, if instead

of devising artificial means of birth-control they will find out the means of self-control.

Artificial methods are like putting a premium upon vice. They make man and woman reckless. And respectability that is being given to the methods must hasten the dissolution of the restraints that public opinion puts upon one. Adoption of artificial methods must result in imbecility and nervous prostration. The remedy will be found to be worse than the disease.

It is wrong and immoral to seek to escape the consequences of one's acts. It is good for a person who overeats to have an ache and a fast. It is bad for him to indulge his appetite and then escape the consequence by taking tonics or other medicine. It is still worse for a person to indulge in his animal passions and escape the consequences of his acts. Nature is relentless and will have full revenge for any such violation of her laws. Moral results can only be produced by moral restraints. All other restraints defeat the very purpose for which they are intended. The reasoning underlying the use of artificial methods is that indulgence is a necessity of life. Nothing can be more fallacious. Let those who are eager to see the births regulated explore the lawful means devised by the ancients, and try to find out how they can be revived. An enormous amount of spade work lies in front of them. Early marriages are a fruitful source of adding to the population. The present mode of life has also a great deal to do with the evil of unchecked procreation. If those causes are investigated and dealt with, society will be morally elevated. If they are ignored by impatient zealots, and if artificial methods become the order of the day, nothing but moral degradation can be the result.

A society that has already become enervated through a variety of causes will become still further enervated by the adoption of artificial methods. Those men therefore who are light-heartedly advocating artificial methods cannot do better than study the subject afresh, stay their injurious activity and popularize *Brahmacharya* both for the married and the unmarried. That is the only noble and straight method of birth-control.

Young India, 12-3-1925

CHAPTER 2

THE USE OF CONTRACEPTIVES

The practice of preventing progeny, by means of artificial methods, is not a new thing. In the past such methods were practised secretly and they were crude. Modern society has given them a respectable place and made improvements. They have been given a philanthropic garb. The advocates of contraceptives say that sexual desire is a natural instinct—some call it a blessing. They therefore say that it is not desirable to suppress the desire even if it were possible. Birth-control by means of self-restraint is, in their opinion, difficult to practise. If a substitute for self-restraint is not prescribed, the health of innumerable women is bound to suffer through frequent pregnancies. They add that if births are not regulated, over-population will ensue; individual families will be pauperized and their children will be ill-fed, ill-clothed and ill-educated. Therfore, they argue, it is the duty of scientists to devise harmless and effective methods of birth-control.

This argument has failed to convince me. The use of contraceptives is likely to produce evils of which we

have no conception. But the worst danger is that the use of contraceptives bids fair to kill the desire for self-restraint. In my opinion it is too heavy a price to pay for any possible immediate gain. . . . Self-deception is the greatest stumbling block. Instead of controlling mind, the fountain of all animal desire, men and women involve themselves in the vain endeavour to avoid the physical act. If there is a determination to control the thought and the action, victory is sure to follow. Man must understand that woman is his companion and helpmate in life and not a means of satisfying his carnal desire. There must be a clear perception that the purpose of human creation was wholly different from that of the satisfaction of animal wants.

Key to Health, pp. 52-54, Edn. 1956

I think it is the height of ignorance to believe that the sexual act is an independent function necessary like sleeping or eating. The world depends for its existence on the act of generation, and as the world is the play-ground of God and a reflection of His glory, the act of generation should be controlled for the ordered growth of the world. He who realizes this will control his lust at any cost, equip himself with the knowledge necessary for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of his progeny, and give the benefit of that knowledge to posterity.

Autobiography, p. 148, Edn. 1958

CHAPTER 3

THE NECESSITY OF CONTINENCE

Many are the keys to health, and they are all quite essential; but one thing needful, above all others, is *Brahmacharya*. Pure air, pure water, and wholesome food certainly contribute to health. But how can we be healthy if we expend all the health that we acquire? How can we help being paupers if we spend all the money that we earn? There can be no doubt that men and women can never be virile or strong unless they observe true *Brahmacharya*.

We hardly realize the fact that incontinence is the root cause of most of the vanity, anger, fear, and jealousy in the world. If our mind is not under our control, if we behave once or oftener every day more foolishly than even little children, what sins may we not commit consciously or unconsciously? How can we pause to think of the consequences of our actions, however vile or sinful they may be?

But you may ask, 'Who has ever seen a true *Brahmachari* in this sense? If all men should turn *Brahmacharis*, would not humanity be extinct and the whole world go to rack and ruin?' We will leave aside the religious aspect of this question and discuss it simply from the secular point of view. To my mind, these questions only betray our timidity and worse. We have not the strength of will to observe *Brahmacharya*, and therefore set about finding pretexts for evading our duty. The race of true *Brahmacharis* is by no means extinct; but if they were commonly to be met with, of what value

would *Brahmacharya* be? Thousands of hardy labourers have to go and dig deep into the bowels of the earth in search of diamonds, and at length they get perhaps merely a handful of them out of heaps and heaps of rock. How much greater, then, should be the labour involved in the discovery of the infinitely more precious diamond of a *Brahmachari*? If the observance of *Brahmacharya* should mean the end of the world, that is none of our business. Are we God that we should be so anxious about its future? He who created it will surely see to its preservation. We need not trouble to enquire whether other people practise *Brahmacharya* or not. When we enter a trade or profession, do we ever pause to consider what the fate of the world would be if all men were to do likewise? The true *Brahmachari* will, in the long run, discover for himself answers to such questions.

But how can men engrossed in the cares of the material world put these ideas into practice? What about those who are married? What shall they do who have children? And what shall be done by those people who cannot control themselves? We have already seen what is the highest state for us to attain. We should keep this ideal constantly before us, and try to approach it to the utmost of our capacity. When little children are taught to write the letters of the alphabet, we show them the perfect shapes of the letters, and they try to reproduce them as best as they can. In the same way, if we steadily work up to the ideal of *Brahmacharya* we may ultimately succeed in realizing it. What if we have married already? The law of Nature is that *Brahmacharya* may be broken only when the husband and wife feel a desire for progeny. Those, who, remembering this law, violate *Brahmacharya* once in four or five years, will not become slaves to lust,

nor lose much of their stock of vital energy. But, alas! how rare are those men and women who yield to the sexual craving merely for the sake of offspring! The vast majority turn to sexual enjoyment merely to satisfy their carnal passion, with the result that children are born to them quite against their will. In the madness of sexual passion, they give no thought to the consequences of their acts. In this respect, men are even more to blame than women. The man is blinded so much by his lust that he never cares to remember that his wife is weak and unable to bear or rear up a child. In the West, indeed, people have transgressed all bounds. They indulge in sexual pleasures, and devise measures in order to evade the responsibilities of parenthood.

Self-restraint v. Self-indulgence, pp 51-53, Edn. 1958

CHAPTER 4

THE LAW OF LIFE

Let me clear the ground by saying that I have not written for *sannyasis* or as a *sannyasi*. I do not claim to be one in the accepted sense of the term. My observations are based upon unbroken personal practice with a slight aberration for a period of twenty-five years and that of those who have joined me in the experiment for a long enough period to warrant certain conclusions. In the experiment both young and old men and women are included. I claim a certain degree of scientific accuracy for the experiment. It has undoubtedly a strictly moral basis, but it originated in the desire for birth-control. My own case was peculiarly for that purpose. Tremendous moral consequences developed as an afterthought though in a perfectly natural sequence. I venture to claim that

by judicious treatment it is possible to observe self-control without much difficulty. Indeed it is a claim put forth not merely by me but German and other Nature Cure practitioners. The latter teach that water treatment or earth compresses and a non-heating and chiefly fruitarian diet soothe the nervous system and bring animal passions under easy subjection whilst they at the same time invigorate the system. The same result is claimed by *rajayogis* for scientifically regulated *pranayama* without reference to the higher practices. Neither the Western nor the ancient Indian treatment is intended for the *sannyasi* but essentially for the house-holder. If it is contended that birth-control is necessary for the nation because of over-population, I dispute the proposition. It has never been proved. In my opinion, by a proper land system, better agriculture and a supplementary industry, this country is capable of supporting twice as many people as there are in it today. But I have joined hands with the advocates of birth-control in India from the standpoint of the present political condition of the country.

I do suggest that men must cease to indulge their animal passions after the need for progeny has ceased. The remedy of self-control can be made popular and effective. It has never had a trial with the educated class. That class has not yet, thanks to the joint family system, felt the pressure. Those that have, have not given a thought to the moral issues involved in the question. Save for stray lectures on *Brahmacharya* no systematic propaganda has been carried on for advocating self-control for the definite purpose of limiting progeny. On the contrary the superstition of a larger family being an auspicious thing and therefore desirable still persists. Religious teachers do not generally teach that

restriction of progeny in given circumstances is as much a religious obligation as procreation may be under certain other circumstances.

I am afraid that advocates of birth-control take it for granted that indulgence in animal passion is a necessity of life and in itself a desirable thing. The solicitude shown for the fair sex is most pathetic. In my opinion it is an insult to the fair sex to put up her case in support of birth-control by artificial methods. As it is, man has sufficiently degraded her for his lust, and artificial methods, no matter how well-meaning the advocates may be, will still further degrade her. I know that there are modern women who advocate these methods. But I have little doubt that the vast majority of women will reject them as inconsistent with their dignity. If man means well by her, let him exercise control over himself. It is not she who tempts. In reality man being the aggressor is the real culprit and the tempter.

I urge the advocates of artificial methods to consider the consequences. Any large use of the methods is likely to result in the dissolution of the marriage bond and in free love. If a man may indulge in animal passion for the sake of it, what is he to do whilst he is, say, away from his home for any length of time, or when he is engaged as a soldier in a protracted war, or when he is widowed, or when his wife is too ill to permit him the indulgence without injury to her health notwithstanding the use of artificial methods ?

* * *

The tuition that is needed for much married and enervated India is not that of indulgence with artificial means but complete restraint, if only for the sake of

regaining lost vitality. Let the immoral medicines whose advertisements disfigure our press be a warning to the advocates of birth-control. It is not prudery or false modesty which restrains me from discussing the subject. The restraining force is the certain knowledge that the devitalized and enervated youth of the country fall an easy prey to the specious arguments advanced in favour of indulgence.

Young India, 2-4-1925

CHAPTER 5

THE RIGHT WAY

How is the suspension of procreation to be brought about? Not by immoral and artificial checks that are resorted to in Europe, but by a life of discipline and self-control. Parents must teach their children the practice of *Brahmacharya*.

I . . . place before the reader a few simple rules which are based on the experience not only of myself, but of many of my associates:

1. Boys and girls should be brought up simply and naturally in the full belief that they are and can remain innocent.

2. All should abstain from heating and stimulating foods, condiments such as chillies, fatty and concentrated foods such as fritters, sweets and fried substances.

3. Husband and wife should occupy separate rooms and avoid privacy.

4. Both body and mind should be constantly and healthily occupied.

5. Early to bed and early to rise should be strictly observed.

6. All unclean literature should be avoided. The antidote for unclean thoughts is clean thoughts.

7. Theatres, cinemas, etc., which tend to stimulate passion, should be shunned.

8. Nocturnal dreams need not cause any anxiety. A cold bath every time for a fairly strong person is the finest preventive in such cases. It is wrong to say that an occasional indulgence is a safeguard against involuntary dreams.

9. Above all, one must not consider continence even as between husband and wife to be so difficult as to be practically impossible. On the contrary, self-restraint must be considered to be the ordinary and natural practice of life.

10. A heart-felt prayer every day for purity makes one progressively pure.

Young India, 13-10-1920

CHAPTER 6

THREE STEPS TO BRAHMACHARYA

Procreation is a natural phenomenon indeed, but within specific limits. A transgression of these limits imperils womankind, emasculates the race, induces disease, puts a premium on vice, and makes the world ungodly. A man in the grip of the sensual desire is a man without moorings. If such a one were to guide society, to flood it with his writings, and men were to be swayed by them, where would society be? And yet we have that very thing happening today. Supposing a moth whirling round a light were to record the moments of its fleeting joy and we were to imitate it, regarding it as an example, where would we be? No, I must declare with all the power I can command that

sensual attraction even between husband and wife is unnatural. Marriage is meant to cleanse the hearts of the couple of sordid passion and take them nearer to God. Lustless love between husband and wife is not impossible. Man is not a brute. He has risen to a higher state after countless births in the brute creation. He is born to stand, not to walk on all fours or crawl. Bestiality is as far removed from manhood as matter from spirit.

In conclusion I shall summarize the means to its attainment.

The first step is the realization of its necessity.

The next is gradual control of the senses. A *Brahmachari* must needs control his palate. He must eat to live, and not for enjoyment. He must see only clean things and close his eyes before anything unclean. It is thus a sign of polite breeding to walk with one's eyes towards the ground and not wandering about from object to object. A *Brahmachari* will likewise hear nothing obscene or unclean, smell no strong, stimulating thing. The smell of clean earth is far sweeter than the fragrance of artificial scents and essences. Let the aspirant to *Brahmacharya* also keep his hands and feet engaged in all the waking hours in healthful activity. Let him also fast occasionally.

The third step is to have clean companions, clean friends and clean books.

The last and not the least is prayer. Let him repeat *Ramanama* with all his heart regularly every day, and ask for divine grace.

None of these things is difficult for an average man or woman. They are simplicity itself. But their very simplicity is embarrassing. Where there is a will, the way is simple enough. Men have not the will for it and hence vainly grope. The fact that the world rests on the obser-

vance, more or less, of *Brahmacharya* or restraint, means that it is necessary and practicable.

Young India, 29-4-1926

CHAPTER 7

BRAHMACHARYA NOT IMPOSSIBLE OF ATTAINMENT

Birth-control by contraceptives no doubt regulates to a certain extent the number of new-comers and enables persons of moderate means to keep the wolf from the door. But the moral harm it does to the individual and society is incalculable. For one thing, the outlook upon life for those who satisfy the sexual appetite for the sake of it is wholly changed. Marriage ceases to be a sacrament for them. It means a revaluation of the social ideals hitherto prized as a precious treasure. No doubt this argument will make little appeal to those who regard the old ideals about marriage as a superstition. My argument is only addressed to those who regard marriage as a sacrament and woman not as an instrument of animal pleasure but as mother of man and trustee of the virtue of her progeny.

My experience of self-control by fellow-workers and myself confirms me in the view presented here. It assumes overwhelming force from the discovery in a vivid light of the ancient conception of marriage. For me *Brahmacharya* in married life now assumes its natural and inevitable position and becomes as simple as the fact of marriage itself. Any other method of birth-control seems useless and unthinkable. Once the idea that the only and grand function of the sexul organ is generation, possesses man and

woman, union for any other purpose they will hold as criminal waste of the vital fluid and consequent excitement caused to man and woman as an equally criminal waste of precious energy. It is now easy to understand why the scientists of old have put such great value upon the vital fluid and why they have insisted upon its strong transmutation into the highest form of energy for the benefit of society. They boldly declare that one who has acquired a perfect control over his or her sexual energy strengthens the whole being, physical, mental and spiritual, and attains powers unattainable by any other means.

Let not the reader be disturbed by the absence of many or even any living specimens of such giant *Brahmacharis*. The *Brahmacharis* we see about us today are very incomplete specimens. At best they are aspirants who have acquired control over their bodies but not their minds. They have not become proof against temptation. This is not because *Brahmacharya* is so difficult of attainment. Social environment is against them, and the majority of those who are making an honest effort unknowingly isolate the control of the animal passion from all other passions, whereas the effort to be successful must include control over all the passions to which man is prey.

Harijan, 21-3-1936

He who attempts to control only one organ, and allows all the others free play, is bound to find his effort futile. To hear suggestive stories with the ears, to see suggestive sights with the eyes, to taste stimulating food with the tongue, to touch exciting things with the hands, and then at the same time expect to control the only remaining organ, is like putting one's hands in the fire, and expecting to escape being burnt. He, therefore, who is resolved to control the one must be likewise determined

to control the rest. I have always felt, that much harm has been done by the narrow definition of *Brahmacharya*. If we practise simultaneous self-control in all directions, the attempt will be scientific and possible of success.

Let us remember the root meaning of *Brahmacharya*. *Charya* means course of conduct; *Brahma-charya* conduct adapted to the search of *Brahma*, i.e., Truth. From this etymological meaning, arises the special meaning, viz., control of all the senses. We must entirely forget the incomplete definition which restricts itself to the sexual aspect only.

From Yeravda Mandir, Ch. III, pp. 13-14, Edn. 1957

CHAPTER 8

MARRIAGE A SACRAMENT

Human society is a ceaseless growth, an unfoldment in terms of spirituality. If so, it must be based on ever increasing restraint upon the demands of the flesh. Thus, marriage must be considered to be a sacrament imposing discipline upon the partners, restricting them to the physical union only among themselves and for the purpose only of procreation when both the partners desire and are prepared for it.

There is an end to all argument, if we start . . . with the premise that sexual act is a necessity outside of the purpose of procreation. The premise is vitiated in the presence of authentic instances that can be cited of complete abstinence having been practised by some of the highest among mankind in all climes. It is no argument against the possibility or desirability of abstinence to say that it is difficult for the vast majority of mankind. What was not possible for the vast majority a hun-

dred years ago has been found possible today. And what is a hundred years in the cycle of time open to us for making infinite progress? If scientists are right, it was but yesterday that we found ourselves endowed with the human body. Who knows, who dare prescribe, its limitation? Indeed every day we are discovering the infiniteness of its capacity for good as well as evil.

If the possibility and desirability of abstinence be admitted, we must find out and devise the means of attaining it. And as I have said in a previous article, life must be remodelled, if we are to live under restraint and discipline. We may not, as the vulgar saying goes, eat the cake and have it too. If we would impose restraint upon the organs of procreation, we must impose it upon all the others. If the eye and the ear and the nose and the tongue, the hands and the feet are let loose, it is impossible to keep the primary organ under check. Most cases of irritability, hysteria and even insanity, which are wrongly ascribed to attempts at continence, will in truth be found traceable to the incontinence of the other senses. No sin, no breach of nature's laws, goes unpunished.

I must not quarrel about words. If self-control be an interference with nature precisely in the same sense as contraceptives, be it so. I would still maintain that the one interference is lawful and desirable because it promotes the well-being of the individuals as well as society, whereas the other degrades both and is therefore unlawful. Self-control is the surest and the only method of regulating the birth-rate. Birth-control by contraceptives is race suicide.

I am painfully conscious of the fact that self-control is not easily attainable. But its slowness need not ruffle us. Haste is waste. Impatience will not end the evil of excessive birth-rate among the proletariat. Workers

among the proletariat have a tremendous task before them. Let them not rule out of their lives the lessons of restraint that the greatest teachers among mankind have handed to us out of the rich stores of their experiences. The fundamental truths they have given us were tested by them in a better laboratory than any equipped under the most up-to-date conditions. The necessity of self-control is the common teaching of them all.

Young India, 16-9-1926

CHAPTER 9

FOR WOMEN REFORMERS

From a serious discussion I had with a sister I fear that my position on the use of contraceptives has not yet been sufficiently understood. My opposition is not due to their having come to us from the West. I thankfully use some Western things when I know that they benefit us as they benefit those in the West. My opposition to contraceptives is based on merits.

I take it that the wisest among the protagonists of contraceptives restrict their use to married women who desire to satisfy their and their husbands' sexual appetite without wanting children. I hold this desire as unnatural in the human species and its satisfaction detrimental to the spiritual progress of the human family. As against this is often cited the following testimony* among others of Lord Dawson of Penn:

> "Sex love is one of the clamant, dominating forces of the world. Here we have an instinct, so fundamental, so imperious

*Reasons of space have necessitated a slight curtailment of Lord Dawson's statement. — Ed.

that its influence is a fact which has to be accepted: suppress it you cannot. You may guide it into healthy channels, but an outlet it will have, and if that outlet is inadequate or unduly obstructed, irregular channels will be forced. Self-control has a breaking point, and if in any community marriage is difficult or late of attainment, an increase of irregular unions will inevitably result.

"Sex love has, apart from parenthood, a purport of its own. It is an essential part of health and happiness in marriage. If sexual union is a gift from God, it is worth learning how to use it. Within its own sphere it should be cultivated so as to bring physical satisfaction to both, not merely to one. The attainment of mutual and reciprocal joy in their relations constitutes a firm bond between two people and make for durability of their marriage tie. More marriages fail from inadequate and clumsy sex love than from too much sex love.

"Birth-control is here to stay. It is an established fact, and for good or evil has to be accepted. No denunciations will abolish it. The reasons which lead parents to limit their offspring are sometimes selfish, but more often honourable and cogent. The desire to marry and to rear children well-equipped for life's struggle, limited incomes, the cost of living, burdensome taxation, are forcible motives; and, further, amongst the educated classes there is the desire of women to take part in life and their husbands' careers, which is incompatible with oft-recurring pregnancies.... But say many, 'Birth-control may be necessary, but the only control which is justifiable is voluntary abstention.' Such abstention would be either ineffective or, if effective, impracticable and harmful to health and happiness. To limit the size of a family to, say, four children, would be to impose on a married couple an amount of abstention which for long periods would almost be equivalent to celibacy, and when one remembers that owing to economic reasons the abstention would have to be most strict during the earlier

years of marriage life when desires are strongest, I maintain a demand is being made which, for the mass of people, it is impossible to meet; that the endeavours to meet it would impose a strain hostile to health and happiness and carry with them grave dangers to morals. The thing is preposterous. You might as well put water by the side of a man suffering from thirst and tell him not to drink it. No, birth-control by abstention is either ineffective, or, if effective, is pernicious.

"It is said to be unnatural and intrinsically immoral. Civilization involves the chaining of natural forces and their conversion to man's will and uses. When anaesthetics were first used at child-birth there was an outcry that their use was unnatural and wicked, because God meant woman to suffer. It is no more unnatural to control child-birth by artificial means. The use of birth-control is good, its abuse bad."

Lord Dawson's eminence is not to be denied. But with all due respect to his greatness as a physician, I am tempted to question the value of his evidence, specially when it is pitted against the experience of men and women who have lived a life of continence without suffering any moral or physical harm. Physicians generally come across those who have so defied laws of health that they have contracted some illness. They, therefore, successfully prescribe what sufferers should do to become well, but they cannot always know what healthy men and women can do in any particular direction. Lord Dawson's evidence, therefore, about the effect of continence on married people has to be taken with the greatest caution. No doubt the tendency among married people is to regard sexual satisfaction for itself as legitimate. But in the modern age in which nothing is taken for granted and everything is rightly scrutinized, it is surely wrong to take it for granted that, because we have

hitherto indulged in the sexual appetite in married life, the practice is either legitimate or healthy. Many old practices have been discontinued with good results. Why should this particular practice be exempt from examination, especially in the light of the experience of those who, even as married men and women, are living a life of restraint with mutual benefit both physical and moral?

But I object to contraceptives also on special grounds in India. Young men in India do not know what sexual restraint is. It is not their fault. They are married early. It is the custom. Nobody tells them to exercise restraint in married life. Parents are impatient to see grandchildren. The poor girl wives are expected by their surroundings to bear children as fast as they can. In such surroundings, the use of contraceptives can only further aggravate the mischief. The poor girls who are expected to submit to their husbands' desires are now to be taught that it is a good thing to desire sexual satisfaction without the desire to have children. And in order to fulfil the double purpose they are to have recourse to contraceptives! ! !

I regard this to be the most pernicious education for married women. I do not believe that woman is prey to sexual desire to the same extent as man. It is easier for her than for man to exercise self-restraint. I hold that the right education in this country is to teach woman the art of saying *no* even to her husband, to teach her that it is no part of her duty to become a mere tool or a doll in her husband's hands. She has rights as well as duties. Those who see in Sita a willing slave under Rama do not realize the loftiness of either her independence or Rama's consideration for her in everything. Sita was no helpless weak woman incapable of protecting herself or her honour. To ask India's women to take to contraceptives is, to say the least, putting the cart before

the horse. The first thing is to free her from mental slavery, to teach her sacredness of her body, and to teach her dignity of national service and the service of humanity. It is not fair to assume that India's women are beyond redemption, and that they have therefore to be simply taught the use of contraceptives for the sake of preventing births and preserving such health as they may be in possession of.

Let not the sisters who are rightly indignant over the miseries of women who are called upon to bear children, whether they will or no, be impatient. Not even the propaganda in favour of contraceptives is going to promote the desired end overnight. Every method is a matter of education. My plea is for the right type.

Harijan, 2-5-1936

CHAPTER 10

MARRIED BRAHMACHARYA

It is a well-known maxim of the science of *Brahmacharya* that insemination in the case of a man who has properly kept the rules of *Brahmacharya* cannot, ought not to, fail to lead to conception. And this is just as it should be. When a man has completely conquered his animality, involuntary incontinence becomes impossible, and the desire for sexual gratification for its own sake ceases altogether. Sexual union then takes place only when there is a desire for offspring. This is the meaning of what has been described as 'Married *Brahmacharya*'. In other words, a person who obeys this rule, though leading a married life, attains the same state as and is equal in merit to one who completely abstains from the sexual act, which is only a means for procreation, never

for self-indulgence. In practice, it is true, this ideal is seen to be rarely realized in its completeness. But in shaping our ideals we cannot think in terms of our weaknesses or the possible lapses. The present tendency, however, is to take a complete swing round, and the protagonists of contraceptives have almost set up self-indulgence as their ideal. Self-indulgence obviously can never be an ideal. There can be no limit to the practice of an ideal. But unlimited self-indulgence, as everybody would admit, can only result in certain destruction of the individual or the race concerned. Hence self-control alone can be our ideal, and it has been so regarded from the earliest times. Therefore we have to explore the means of its attainment, not to circumvent it.

It has become my settled conviction that most of the difficulties that are experienced in connection with the practice of *Brahmacharya* are due to our ignorance about its laws and would of themselves disappear if we discovered them. Let us, for instance, examine the poser propounded by our correspondent in the ideal light. In the ideal state, in the first place, such a contingency will never arise, because in a normally healthy couple, who have from their childhood upward observed the rules of *Brahmacharya*, sexual union can never prove infertile. In practice, however, anomalies do arise. The only rule that can be laid down in such instances is that the coitus may be permitted once at the end of the monthly period till conception is established. If its object is achieved it must be abjured forthwith, for mere sensual gratification should never be its object. It is my faith based on my experience that bodily and mental health increases in the same ratio as bodily and mental chastity. Nor is it to be wondered at. A substance that is capable of producing such a wonderful being as

man cannot but, when properly conserved, be transmuted into matchless energy and strength. Anyone can test the truth of this observation of the *shastras* for himself by personal experience. And the rule holds good in respect of woman no less than man. The real difficulty, however, is that we vainly expect to be free from outward manifestations of lust, while harbouring it in our minds, with the result that physically and mentally we become utter wrecks, and our lives, in the words of the *Gita*, become a living lie or hypocrisy personified.

Harijan, 20-3-1937

CHAPTER 11

UNWANTED MOTHERHOOD

Current literature that India imports weekly from the Far West would have us believe that in America none but idiots and imbeciles oppose the use of this modern method of deliverance from the bondage of the superstition which imprisons the body and crushes it by denying it its supreme enjoyment. That literature produces as much momentary intoxication as the act which it teaches and incites us to perform without incurring the risks of its ordinary result. I do not put before the readers of *Harijan* merely letters of individual condemnation received from the West. They have their use for me as a seeker but very little for the general reader.

The use of contraceptives is infinitely more tempting than the whisky bottle. But it is no more lawful than the sparkling liquid for its fatal temptation. Nor can opposition to the use of either be given up in despair because their use seems to be growing. If the oppo-

nents have faith in their mission, it has to be pursued. A voice in the wilderness has a potency which voices uttered in the midst of 'the madding crowd' lack. For the voice in the wilderness has meditation, deliberation and unquenchable faith behind it, whilst the babel of voices has generally nothing but the backing of the experience of personal enjoyment or the false and sentimental pity for the unwanted children and their suffering mothers. Argument of personal experience has as much weight as an act of a drunkard. The argument of pity is a trap into which it is dangerous to fall. Sufferings of unwanted children and of equally unwanted motherhood are punishments or warnings devised by beneficent nature. Disregard of the law of discipline and restraint is suicide. Ours is a state of probation. If we refuse to bear the yoke of discipline, we court failure like cowards, we avoid battle and give up the only joy of living.

Harijan, 27-3-1937

CHAPTER 12

WOMEN MUST LEARN TO SAY "NO"

All the evidence in my possession goes to show that it is man who lacks the power of self-restraint more than woman. But there is no need for belittling his own inability to exercise restraint. He must manfully face the prospect of a large family and discover the best means of supporting them. He must know that against the millions who are strangers to the use of contraceptives, there are possibly a few thousand who use them. The millions are in no dread of having to breed their children though the latter may not all be wanted. I suggest that it is cowardly to refuse to face the consequences

of one's acts. Persons who use contraceptives will never learn the virtue of self-restraint. They will not need it. Self-indulgence with contraceptives may prevent the coming of children but will sap the vitality of both men and women—perhaps more of men than of women. It is unmanly to refuse battle with the devil. Let my correspondent resolve upon self-restraint as the only sure and honourable method of avoiding unwanted children. What though he and his fail in the effort a hundred times? Joy is in the battle. The result comes by the grace of God.

Harijan, 17-4-1937

Contraceptives are an insult to womanhood. The difference between a prostitute and a woman using contraceptives is only this that the former sells her body to several men, the latter sells it to one man. Man has no right to touch his wife so long as she does not wish to have a child, and the woman should have the will-power to resist, even her own husband.

Harijan, 5-5-1946

Women should have to resist their husbands. If contraceptives are resorted to, frightful results will follow. Men and women will be living for sex alone. They will become soft-brained, unhinged, in fact mental and moral wrecks.

From a report of an interview with Gandhiji published in the *Amtita Bazar Patrika* dated 12-1-1935

I have felt that during the years still left to me if I can drive home to women's minds the truth that they are free, we shall have no birth-control problem in India. If they will only learn to say 'no' to their husbands when they approach them carnally . . . all will be well. . . . The real problem is that they do

not want to resist them. It boils down to education. I want woman to learn the primary right of resistance. She thinks now that she has not got it.

From a report by Mrs. Margaret Sanger of her talks with Gandhiji published by her in *Asia*, Nov. 1935.

CHAPTER 13

MODERN YOUTH

It is the fashion in some quarters nowadays for the young to discredit whatever may be said by old people. I am not prepared to say that there is absolutely no justification for this belief. But I warn the youth of the country against always discounting whatever old men or women may say, for the mere fact that it is said by such persons. Even as wisdom often comes from the mouths of babes, so does it often come from the mouths of old people. The golden rule is to test everything in the light of reason and experience, no matter from whom it comes. I want to revert to the subject of birth-control by contraceptives. It is dinned into one's ears that gratification of the sex urge is a solemn obligation like the obligation of discharging debts lawfully incurred, and that, not to do so would involve the penalty of intellectual decay. This sex urge has been isolated from the desire for progeny, and it is said by the protagonists of the use of contraceptives that conception is an accident to be prevented except when the parties desire to have children. I venture to suggest that this is a most dangerous doctrine to preach anywhere, much more so in a country like India where the middle class male population has become imbecile through abuse of the creative function. If satisfaction of the sex urge is a duty, the unnatural vice of which I wrote some time ago

and several other ways of gratification would be commendable. The reader should know that even persons of note have been known to approve of what is commonly known as sexual perversion. He may be shocked at the statement. But if it somehow or other gains the stamp of respectability, it will be the rage among boys and girls to satisfy their urge among members of their own sex. For me the use of contraceptives is not far removed from the means to which persons have hitherto resorted for the gratification of their sexual desire with the results that very few know. I know what havoc secret vice has played among school boys and girls. The introduction of contraceptives under the name of science and the *imprimatur* of known leaders of society have intensified the complication and made the task of reformers who work for purity of social life, well-nigh impossible for the moment. I betray no confidence when I inform the reader that there are unmarried girls of impressionable age studying in schools and colleges who study birth-control literature and magazines with avidity and even possess contraceptives. It is impossible to confine their use to married women. Marriage loses its sanctity when its purpose and highest use is conceived to be the satisfaction of the animal passion without contemplating the natural result of such satisfaction.

I have no doubt that those learned men and women who are carrying on propaganda with missionary zeal in favour of the use of contraceptives, are doing irreparable harm to the youth of the country under the false belief that they will be saving thereby, the poor women who may be obliged to bear children against their will. Those who need to limit their children will not be easily reached by them. Our poor women have not the knowledge or the training that the women of the West

have. Surely the propaganda is not being carried on on behalf of the middle class women, for they do not need the knowledge, at any rate so much as the poor classes do.

The greatest harm, however, done by that propaganda lies in its rejection of the old ideal and substitution in its place of one which, if carried out, must spell the moral and physical extinction of the race. The horror with which ancient literature has regarded the fruitless use of the vital fluid was not a superstition born of ignorance. What shall we say of a husbandman who will sow the finest seed in his possession on stony ground or of the owner of a field who will receive, in his field rich with fine soil, good seed under conditions that will make it impossible for it to grow? God has blessed man with seed that has the highest potency and woman with a field richer than the richest earth to be found anywhere on this globe. Surely it is criminal folly for man to allow his most precious possession to run to waste. He must guard it with a care greater than he will bestow upon the richest pearls in his possession. And so is a woman guilty of criminal folly who will receive the seed in her life-producing field with the deliberate intention of letting it run to waste. Both he and she will be judged guilty of the misuse of the talents given to them and they will be dispossessed of what they have been given. Sex urge is a fine and noble thing. There is nothing to be ashamed of in it. But it is meant only for the act of creation. Any other use of it is a sin against God and humanity. Contraceptives of a kind there were before and there will be hereafter; but the use of them was formerly regarded as sinful. It was reserved for our generation to glorify vice by calling it virtue. The greatest disservice protagonists of contraceptives are rendering to the youth of India is to fill their minds

with what appears to me to be wrong ideology. Let the young men and women of India who hold her destiny in their hands beware of this false god and guard the treasure with which God has blessed them and use it, if they wish, for the only purpose for which it is intended.

Harijan, 28-3-1936

CHAPTER 14

HEADING FOR PROMISCUITY

In the course of a letter a young man wrote to Gandhiji:

> "You claim to know the mind of Indian youth. I do not claim to represent anybody, but as a solitary young man I beg to challenge your claim. You do not seem to know through what environment, the modern middle-class youth is passing, what with long spells of unemployment, crushing social customs and traditions, and temptations of co-education! It is all a conflict between the old and the new ideas, resulting usually in the defeat and misery of youth. I humbly request you to be kind and compassionate to the youth and not to judge them by your puritanic standards of morality. After all, I think, every act, when it is performed with mutual consent and mutual love, is moral whether it is performed within marriage or without. Since the invention of contraceptives the sexual basis of the institution of marriage has been knocked down. It has now become an institution mainly for the protection and welfare of children."

In his comments on this letter Gandhiji wrote as follows:

Without continence a man or woman is undone. To have no control over the senses is like sailing in a rudderless ship bound to break to pieces on coming in

contact with the very first rock. Hence my constant insistence on continence. My correspondent is right in saying in effect that the coming in of contraceptives has changed the ideas about sexual relations. If mutual consent makes a sexual act moral whether within marriage or without, and by parity of reasoning, even between members of the same sex, the whole basis of sexual morality is gone and nothing but 'misery and defeat' awaits the youth of the country. Many young men and women are to be found in India who would be glad to be free from the craving for mutual inter-course in whose grip they find themselves. This craving is stronger than the strongest intoxicant which has ever enslaved man. It is futile to hope that the use of contraceptives will be restricted to the mere regulation of progeny. There is hope for a decent life only so long as the sexual act is definitely related to the conception of precious life. This rules out of court perverted sexuality and to a lesser degree promiscuity. Divorce of the sexual act from its natural consequence must lead to hideous promiscuity and condonation, if not endorsement, of unnatural vice.

Harijan, 3-10-1936

CHAPTER 15

CONSERVATION OF VITAL ENERGY

All power comes from the preservation and sublimation of the vitality that is responsible for creation of life. If the vitality is husbanded instead of being dissipated, it is transmuted into creative energy of the highest order. This vitality is continuously and even unconsciously dissipated by evil, or even rambling, disorderly, unwanted, thoughts. And since thought is the root of all speech and

action, the quality of the latter corresponds to that of the former. Hence perfectly controlled thought is itself power of the highest potency and can become self-acting. That seems to me to be the meaning of the silent prayer of the heart. If man is after the image of God, he has but to will a thing in the limited sphere allotted to him and it becomes. Such power is impossible in one who dissipates his energy in any way whatsoever, even as steam kept in a leaky pipe yields no power. The sexual act divorced from the deliberate purpose of generation is a typical and gross form of dissipation and has therefore been specially and rightly chosen for condemnation. But in one who has to organize vast masses of mankind for non-violent action, the full control described by me has to be attempted and virtually achieved.

This control is unattainable save by the grace of God. There is a verse in the second chapter of the *Gita* which freely rendered means: "Sense-effects remain in abeyance whilst one is fasting or whilst the particular sense is starved; but the hankering does not cease except when one sees God face to face." This control is not mechanical or temporary. Once attained it is never lost. In that state vital energy is stored up without any chance of escaping by the innumerable outlets.

Haijan, 23-7-1938

CHAPTER 16

SOUL'S CAPACITY FOR SELF-CONTROL

My quarrel with the advocates of contraceptives lies in their taking it for granted that ordinary mortals cannot exercise self-control. Some of them even go so far as to say that even if they can, they ought not to do so. To them,

no matter how eminent they may be in their own spheres, I say, in all humility but with utmost confidence, that they are talking without exprience of the possibilities of self-control. They have no right to limit the capacity of the human soul. In such instances the positive evidence of one person like me, if it is reliable, is not only of greater value but decisive. To dismiss my evidence as useless because I am popularly regarded as a 'Mahatma', is not proper in a serious inquiry.

We are living in times when values are undergoing quick changes. We are not satisfied with slow results. We are not satisfied with the welfare merely of our own caste-fellows, not even of our own country. We feel or want to feel for the whole of humanity. All this is a tremendous gain in humanity's march towards its goal.

But we won't find the remedy for human ills by losing patience and by rejecting everything that is old because it is old. Our ancestors also dreamt, perhaps vaguely, the same dreams that fire us with zeal. The remedies they applied for similar ills, it is possible, are applicable even to the horizon that appears to have widened beyond expectations.

And my plea based on positive experience is that even as truth and *ahimsa* are not merely for the chosen few but for the whole of humanity to be practised in daily life, so exactly is self-control not merely for a few 'Mahatmas' but for the whole of humanity. And even as, because many people will be untruthful and violent, humanity may not lower its standard, so also, though many, even the majority, may not respond to the message of self-control, we may not lower our standard.

A wise judge will not give a wrong decision in the face of a hard case. He will allow himself to appear to

have hardened his heart because he *knows* that truest mercy lies in not making bad law.

We may not attribute the weaknesses of the perishable body or the flesh to the imperishable soul that resides in it. We have to regulate the body in the light of the laws that govern the soul. In my humble opinion, these laws are few and unchangeable, capable of being understood and followed by the whole of the human family. There would be differences of degree but not of kind in their application. If we have faith, we won't lose it, because it may take a million years before humanity realizes or makes the nearest or visible approach to its goal. In Jawaharlal's language, let us have the correct ideology.

Harijan, 30-5-1936

CHAPTER 17

THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

The fact is that the medical profession have so far regarded subject of self-control as being outside their purview. But there are gathering signs of a coming healthy change in their outlook. The goal that the medical science has set before itself is the discovery of the cause and cure of disease. An honest pursuit of that goal is bound at last to bring it up against self-indulgence and lack of self-discipline as the prime cause of many diseases. For, with the advance of knowledge and insight, sociey is bound to insist more and more on prevention of disease by the removal of the root causes, rather than its cure alone. Complete eradication of disease is an utter impossibility unless the people learn to observe the elementary rule of self-discipline. The fact is so obvious that its recognition cannot be long delayed, and with its recognition will come great-

er emphasis on the part of the medical profession on self-discipline and self-control as a factor in a healthful existence. The Birth Control League of Ahmedabad should understand that spread of contraceptive knowledge and practice can only aid the growth of self-indulgence and abuse and its inevitable concomitants, misery and disease. I would therefore earnestly suggest to the promoters of the said League that if they will only utilize their time and energy to study deeply the evils of self-indulgence and inculcate upon the women the necessity and naturalness of practising self-control as a means of attaining birth-control, they will find that they have discovered the best and quickest method of realizing their goal.

Harijan, 12-12-1936

It is the philanthropic motive that no doubt impels many birth-control reformers to a whirlwind campaign in favour of the use of contraceptives. I invite them to contemplate the ruinous consequences of their misplaced philanthropy. Those whom they want to reach will never use them in any appreciable numbers. Those who ought not to use them will, without doubt, use them to the undoing of themselves and their partners. This would not matter in the least, if the use of contraceptives was incontestably proved to be right physically and morally.

Harijan, 12-9-1936

CHAPTER 18

SEX EDUCATION

What place has . . . instruction in sexual science in our educational system, or has it any place there at all? Sexual science is of two kinds—that which is used for controlling or overcoming the sexual passion, and that

which is used to stimulate and feed it. Instruction in the former is as necessary a part of a child's education as the latter is harmful and dangerous and fit therefore only to be shunned. All great religions have rightly regarded *Kama* as the arch-enemy of man, anger or hatred coming only in the second place. According to the Gita, the latter is an offspring of the former. The Gita, of course, uses the word *Kama* in its wider sense of desire. But the same holds good of the narrow sense in which it is used here.

This, however, still leaves unanswered the question, i.e. whether it is desirable to impart to young pupils a knowledge about the use and function of generative organs. It seems to me that it is necessary to impart such knowledge to a certain extent. At present they are often left to pick up such knowledge anyhow with the result that they are misled into abusive practices. We cannot properly control or conquer the sexual passion by turning a blind eye to it. I am, therefore, strongly in favour of teaching young boys and girls, the significance and right use of their generative organs. And in my own way I have tried to impart this knowledge to young children of both sexes for whose training I was responsible.

But the sex education that I stand for, must have for its object the conquest and sublimation of the sex passion. Such education should automatically serve to bring home to children, the essential distinction between man and brute, to make them realize that it is man's special privilege and pride to be gifted with the faculties of head and heart both; that he is a thinking no less than a feeling animal, as the very derivation of the word मनुष्य shows, and to renounce the sovereignty of reason over the blind instincts is, therefore, to renounce a man's estate.

In man, reason quickens and guides the feeling. In brute, the soul lies ever dormant. To awaken the heart is to awaken the dormant soul, to awaken reason, and to inculcate discrimination between good and evil.

Who should teach this true science of sex? Clearly, he who has attained mastery over his passions. To teach astronomy and kindred sciences we have teachers who have gone through course of training in them and are masters of their art. Even so must we have as teachers of sexual science, i.e. the science of sex-control, those who have studied it and have acquired mastery over self. Even a lofty utterance, that has not the backing of sincerity and experience, will be inert and lifeless, and will utterly fail to penetrate and quicken the hearts of men, while the speech that springs from self-realization and genuine experience is always fruitful.

Today our entire environment—our reading, our thinking, our social behaviour—is generally calculated to subserve and cater for the sex-urge. To break through its coils is no easy task. But it is a task worthy of our highest endeavour. Even if there are a handful of teachers endowed with practical experience, who accept the ideal of attaining self-control as the highest duty of man, and are fired by a genuine and undying faith in their mission, and are sleeplessly vigilant and active, their labour will light the path of the children . . . save the unwary from falling into the mire of sexuality, and rescue those who might be already engulfed in it.

Harijan, 21-11-1936

CHAPTER 19

"TOWARDS MORAL BANKRUPTCY"

[In the course of a review of a work in French entitled *D' Indiscipline des moeurs* (*Towards Moral Bankruptcy*) by M. Paul Bureau, Gandhiji wrote as follows after giving a summary of the author's views:]

Contraceptives are not universal in India. Their use has hardly touched the educated classes. The use of contraceptives in India is, in my opinion, unwarranted by any single condition that can be named. Do middle-class parents suffer from too many children? Individual instances will not suffice to make out a case for excessive birth-rate among the middle classes. The cases in India where I have observed the advocacy of these methods are those of widows and young wives. Thus in the one case it is illegitimate birth that is to be avoided, not the secret intercourse. In the other it is again pregnancy that is to be feared, and not the rape, of a girl of tender age. Then there remains the class of diseased, weak, effeminate young men who would indulge in excesses with their own wives or others' wives and would avoid the consequences of acts which they know to be sinful. The cases of men or women in full vigour of life desiring intercourse and yet wishing to avoid the burden of children are, I make bold to say, rare in this ocean of Indian humanity. Let them not parade their cases to justify and advocate a practice that in India, if it became general, is bound to ruin the youth of the country. A highly artificial education has robbed the nation's youth of physical and mental vigour. We are offspring in many

cases of child marriages. Our disregard of the laws of health and sanitation has undermined our bodies. Our wrong and deficient dietary composed of corroding spices has produced a collapse of the digestive apparatus. We need, not lessons in the use of contraceptives and helps to our being able to satisfy our animal appetite, but continuous lessons to restrain that appetite, in many cases even to the extent of absolute continence. We need to be taught by precept and example that continence is perfectly possible and imperatively necessary if we are not to remain mentally and physically weak. We need to be told from the house-top that if we will not be a nation of manikins, we must conserve and add to the limited vital energy we are daily dissipating. Our young widows need to be told not to sin secretly but come out boldly and openly to demand marriage which is their right as much as that of young widowers. We need to cultivate public opinion that shall make child marriages impossible. The vacillation, and the disinclination to do hard and sustained work, the physical inability to perform strenuous labours, collapses of enterprises brilliantly begun, the want of originality, one notices so often, are due largely to excessive indulgence. I hope young men do not deceive themselves into the belief that when there is no procreation the mere indulgence does not matter, does not weaken. Indeed the sexual act, with the unnatural safeguard against procreation, is likely to be far more exhausting than such act performed with a full sense of the responsibility attached to it.

"The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

If we begin to believe that indulgence in animal passion is necessary, harmless and sinless, we shall want to give reins to it and shall be powerless to resist it.

Whereas if we educate ourselves to believe that such indulgence is harmful, sinful, unnecessary, and can be controlled, we shall discover that self-restraint is perfectly possible. Let us beware of the strong wine of libertinism that the intoxicated West sends us under the guise of new truth and so-called human freedom. Let us, on the contrary, listen to the sober voice from the West, that through the rich experience of its wise men at times percolates to us, if indeeed we have outgrown the ancient wisdom of our forefathers.

Charles Andrews has sent me an informing article on "Generation and Regeneration" written by William Leftus Hare and published in *The Open Court* (March 1926). It is a closely reasoned scientific essay. He shows that all bodies perform two functions: "viz., internal reproduction for the building up of the body, and external reproduction for the continuance of the species." These processes he names regeneration and generation respectively. "The regenerative process—internal reproduction—is fundamental for the individual and therefore necessary and primary, the genertive process is due to a superfluity of cells and is therefore secondary. . . . The law of life, then, at this level is to feed the germ cells firstly for regeneration and secondly for generation. In case of deficiency, regeneration must take the first place and generation be suspended. Thus we may learn the origin of the suspension of reproduction and follow it to its later phases of human continence and asceticism generally. Inner reproduction can never be suspended except at the cost of death, the normal origin of which is thus also discerned." After describing the biological process of regeneration the writer states: "Among civilized human beings sexual intercourse is practised vastly more than is necessary for the production of the next generation and

is carried on at the expense of internal reproduction, bringing disease, death and more in its train."

No one who knows anything of Hindu philosophy can have difficulty in following this paragraph from Mr. Hare's essay:

"The process of regeneration is not and cannot be mechanistic in character, but like the primitive fission is vitalistic. That is to say, it exhibits intelligence and will. To suppose that life separates, differentiates and segregates by a process that is purely mechanistic is inconceivable. True, these fundamental processes are so far removed from our present consciousness as to seem to be uncontrolled by the human or animal will. But a moment's reflection will show, that just as the will of the fully developed human being directs his external movements and actions in accordance with the guidance of the intellect,—this, indeed being its function,—so the earlier processes of the gradual organization of the body must, within the limits provided by environment, be allowed to be directed by a kind of will guided by a kind of intelligence. This is now known to psychologists as 'the unconscious'. It is a part of our self, disconnected from our normal daily thinking, but intensely awake and alert in regard to its own functions—so much so that it never for a moment subsides into sleep as the consciousness does."

Who can measure the almost irreparable harm done to the unconscious and more permanent part of our being by the sexual act indulged in for its own sake? 'The nemesis of reproduction is death. The sexual act is essentially katabolic (or a movement towards death) in the male, and in parturition of the offspring it is katabolic for the female.' Hence the writer contends: "Virility,

vitality and immunity from disease are the normal lot of nearly or quite continent persons." "Withdrawal of germ cells from their upward regenerative course for generative or merely indulgent purposes deprives the organs of their replenishing stock of life, to their cost slowly and ultimately." "It is these physical facts which constitute the basis of a personal sexual ethic, counselling moderation, if not restraint—at any rate, explaining the origin of restraint." The author, as can be easily imagined, is opposed to birth-control by chemical and mechanical means. He says: "It removes all prudential motives for self-restraint, and makes it possible for sexual indulgence in marriage to be limited only by the diminution of desire or the advance of old age. Apart from this, however, it inevitably has an influence outside the marriage relation. It opens the door for irregular, promiscuous and unfruitful unions, which, from the point of view of modern industry, sociology and politics, are full of danger. I cannot go into these here. It is sufficient to say that by contraception, inordinate sexual indulgence both in and out of marriage is facilitated, and, if I am right in my foregoing physiological arguments, evil must come to both individuals and the race."

Let the Indian youth treasure in their hearts the quotation with which M. Bureau's book ends:

"The future is for the nations who are chaste."

Self-restraint v. Self-indulgence, pp. 37-40, Edn. 1958

CHAPTER 20

THE COMMON BED

William R. Thurston, according to the publisher's note, was a Major in the United States Army, which he served for nearly ten years. And, during these years, he had varied experiences in several parts of the world, including China. During his travels, he studied the effects of marriage laws and customs, as a result of which he felt the call to write a book on marriage. This book, which is called *Thurston's Philosophy of Marriage* and was published last year by the Tiffany Press, New York, contains only 32 pages of bold type, and can be read inside of an hour. The author has not entered into an elaborate argument, but has simply set forth his conclusions which the publisher truly describes as 'startling'. In his foreword, the author claims to have based his conclusions on 'personal observation, data obtained from physicians, statistics of social hygiene and medical statistics,' compiled during the War. His conclusions are:

1. "That Nature never intended a woman to be bound to a man for life, and to be compelled to occupy the same bed or habitation with him, night after night, in pregnancy and out, in order to earn her board and lodging, and to exercise natural right to bear children.

2. "That the daily and nightly juxtaposition of the male and female, which is a result of present marriage laws and customs, leads to unrestrained sexual intercourse which perverts the natural instinct of both male and female, and makes partial prostitutes of ninety per cent of all married women. This con-

dition arises from the fact, that married women have been led to believe that such prostitution of themselves is right and natural because it is legal, and that it is necessary in order to retain the affections of their husbands."

The author, then, goes on to describe the effect of 'continual, unrestrained sexual intercourse', which I epitomize as follows:

(*a*) "It causes the woman to become highly nervous, prematurely aged, diseased, irritable, restless, discontented and incapable of properly caring for her children."

(*b*) "Among the poorer classes, it leads to the propagation of many children who are not wanted."

(*c*) "Among the higher classes, unrestrained sexual intercourse leads to the practice of contraception and abortions." "*If contraceptive methods, under the name of 'birth-control' or any other name are taught to the majority of the women of the masses, the race will become generally diseased, demoralized, depraved, and will eventually perish.*" (The italics are the author's.)

(*d*) "Excessive sexual intercourse drains the male of the vitality necessary for earning a good living." "At present there are *approximately 2,000,000 more widows in the United States than there are widowers. Comparatively few of these are war widows.*" (The italics are the author's).

(*e*) "The excessive sexual intercourse incident to the present married state develops in the minds of both male and female a sense of futility." "*The poverty of the world today and the slums of the larger cities are not due to lack of profitable labour to be performed, but to excessive, unrestrained sexual intercourse, resulting from present marriage laws.*" (The italics are the author's.)

(*f*) "Most serious of all from the standpoint of the future of the human race is sexual intercourse during pregnancy."

Then follows an indictment of China and India into which I need not go. This brings us to half of this booklet. The next half is devoted to the remedy.

The central fact of the remedy is that husband and wife must always live in separate rooms, therefore necessarily sleep in separate beds, and meet only when both desire progeny, but especially the wife. I do not intend to give the changes suggested in the marriage laws. The one thing common to all marriages throughout the world is a common room and a common bed, and this the author condemns in unmeasured terms, I venture to think, rightly. There is no doubt that much of the sensuality of our nature, whether male or female, is due to the superstition bearing a religious sanction that married people are bound to share the same bed and the same room. It has produced a mentality, the disastrous effect of which it is difficult for us, living in the atmosphere generated by that superstition, properly to estimate.

The author is equally opposed, as we have already seen, to contraceptive methods.

Many of the other remedies, suggested by the author, are, in my opinion, not of practical use to us, and in any case, require legislative sanction. But every husband and wife can make a fixed resolution from today never to share the same room or the same bed at night and to avoid sexual contact, except for the one supreme purpose for which it is intended for both man and beast. The beast observes the law invariably. Man having got the choice has grievously erred in making the wrong choice. Every woman can decline to have anything to do with contraception. Both man and woman should know that abstention from satisfaction of the sexual appetite results not in disease but in health and vigour, provided that mind co-operates with the body. The author believes that the present condition of marriage laws 'is responsible for the greater part of all the ills of the world today.'

One need not share this sweeping belief with the author to come to the two final decisions I have suggested. But there can be no doubt that a large part of the miseries of today can be avoided if we look at the relations between the sexes in a healthy and pure light, and regard ourselves as trustees for the moral welfare of the future generations.

Young India, 27-9-1928

CHAPTER 21

BOGEY OF OVER-POPULATION

Major Gen. Sir John McGaw, President, India Office Medical Board, is reported by a correspondent to have said:

> "Famine in India will recur; in fact India is today facing perpetual famine. Unless something is done to decrease the birth rate in India, the country will be leading straight for a calamity."

The correspondent asks what I have to say on this grave issue.

For me, this and some other ways of explaining away famines in India, is to divert the attention from the only cause of recurring famines in this benighted land. I have stated and repeat here that famines of India are not a calamity descended upon us from nature but is a calamity created by the rulers—whether through ignorant indifference or whether consciously or otherwise does not matter. Prevention against draught is not beyond human effort and ingenuity. Such effort has not proved ineffective in other countries. In India a sustained intelligent effort has never been made.

The bogey of increasing birth-rate is not a new thing. It has been often trotted out. Increase in population is not and ought not to be regarded as a calamity to be avoided. Its regulation or restriction by artificial methods is a calamity of the first grade whether we know it or not. It is bound to degrade the race, if it becomes universal, which, thank God, it is never likely to be. Pestilence, wars and famines are cursed antidotes against cursed lust which is responsible for unwanted children. If we would avoid this three-fold curse we would avoid too the curse of unwanted children by the sovereign remedy of self-control. The evil consequences of artificial methods are being seen by discerning men even now. Without however encroaching upon the moral domain, let me say that propagation of the race rabbitwise must undoubtedly be stopped; but not so as to bring greater evils in its train. It should be stopped by methods which in themselves ennoble the race. In other words, it is all a matter of proper education which would embrace every department of life; and dealing with one curse will take in its orbit all the others. A way is not to be avoided because it is upward and therefore uphill. Man's upward progress necessarily means ever increasing difficulty, which is to be welcomed.

Harijan, 31-3-1946

This little globe of ours is not a toy of yesterday. It has not suffered from the weight of over-population through its age of countless millions. How can it be that the truth has suddenly dawned upon some people that it is in danger of perishing of shortage of food unless birth-rate is checked through the use of contraceptives?

Harijan, 14-9-1935

Sterilization

I consider it inhuman to impose sterilization law on the people. But in cases of individuals with chronic

diseases, it is desirable to have them sterilized if they are agreeable to it. Sterilization is a sort of contraceptive and though I am against the use of contraceptives in case of women, I do not mind voluntary sterilization in case of man since he is the aggressor.

Amrita Bazar Patrika, 12-1-1935

CHAPTER 22

THREE BIRTH-CONTROL ENTHUSIASTS

[During his stay in Sevagram in 1935 and 1936 three birth-control enthusiasts separately came to see Gandhiji and tried to convert him to their "gospel". They were Mrs. How-Martyn from England, Swami Yoganand, a Hindu missionary resident in America, and Mrs. Margaret Sanger, the famous leader of the Birth-Control movement. Reports of the interviews they had with Gandhiji were given by Shri Mahadev Desai in his Weekly Letters in *Harijan* at the time. The following extracts are taken from these reports:]

Mrs. How-Martyn

Mrs. How-Martyn : " . . . what I say is that without some form of birth-control there is no salvation. You would do it in one way, I would do it in another. I advocate your method as well, but not in all cases. You seem to regard a beautiful function as something objectionable. Two animals are nearest to the divine when they are going to create new life. There is something very beautiful in the act."

"Here again you are labouring under a confusion," said Gandhiji. "The creation of a new life is nearest the divine, I agree. All I want is that one should approach that act in a divine way. That is to say, man

and woman must come together with no other desire than that of creating a new life. But if they come together merely to have a fond embrace, they are nearest the devil. Man unfortunately forgets that he is nearest the divine, hankers after the brute instinct in himself and becomes less than the brute."

"But why must you cast aspersion on the brute?"

"I do not. The brute fulfils the law of his own nature. The lion in his majesty is a noble creature and he has a perfect right to eat me up; but I have none to develop paws and pounce upon you. Then I lower myself and become worse than the brute."

"I am sorry," said Mrs. How-Martyn, "I have expressed myself very badly. I confess that in a majority of cases it is not going to be their salvation, but a factor which will conduce to higher life. You understand what I mean, though I am afraid I have not been able to make myself quite clear."

"Oh, no. I do not want to take any undue advantage of you. But I want you to understand my viewpoint. Do not run away with misconceptions. Man must choose either of the two courses, the upward or the downward; but as he has the brute in him, he will more easily choose the downward course than the upward, especially when the downward course is presented to him in a beautiful garb. Man easily capitulates when sin is presented in the garb of virtue, and that is what Marie Stopes and others are doing. If I were to popularize the religion of indulgence, I know that men would simply clutch at it. I know that, if people like you in selfless zeal cried themselves hoarse upholding your doctrine, you might even ride to apparent victory; but I also know that you will ride to certain death, of course totally unconscious of the mischief you are doing. The

downward instinct requires no advocacy, no argument. It is there embodied in them, and unless you regulate and control it, there is danger of disease and pestilence."

Harijan, 1-2-1935

Swami Yoganand

The Swami: "You would prefer self-control to birth-control?"

"I think artificial birth-control or birth-control according to methods suggested today and recommended in the West is suicidal. When I say 'suicidal', I do not mean resulting inthe extinction of the race; I mean suicidal in a higher sense of the term, that is to say, these methods make man lower than the brute; they are immoral."

"But how long are we to tolerate indiscriminate procreation? I know a man who used to purchase a *seer* of milk, and went on diluting it with water in order to divide it between his children whose number increased every year. Don't you think this was a sin?"

"It is a sin to bring forth unwanted children, but I think it is a greater sin to avoid the consequences of one's own action. It simply unmans man."

"What then is the most practical method of telling man this truth?"

"The most practical method is to live the life of self-control. Example is better than precept."

"But the West asks us, 'Why is it that you have greater child mortality and lower life average than we, though you regard yourselves as more spiritual than the West?' Do you believe in many children, Mahatmaji?"

"I believe in no children."

"Then the whole race will be extinct."

"It won't be extinct. It will be transformed into something better. But it can never happen, for we have inherited from eternity the sex instinct from our progenitors. It means a tremendous effort to check this habit of ages, and yet it is a simple effort. Absolute renunciation, absolute *Brahmacharya* is the ideal state. If you dare not think of it, marry by all means, but even then live a life of self-control."

"Have you any working method to teach this to the masses?"

"It is, as I said a moment ago, to attain complete self-control and go and live that life amongst the masses. A life of self-restraint and denial of all luxuries cannot but have its effect on the masses. There is an indissoluble connection between self-control and the control of the palate. The man who observes *Brahmacharya* will be controlled in every one of his acts and will be humble."

"I see what you mean," said the Swami. "The masses do not know the happiness of self-control and we have to teach them that. But what about the argument of the West I referred to before?"

"I do not think that we are more spiritually-minded than the West. If we were, we should not have fallen so low. But because the average life of a Westerner is much higher than ours, it does not prove the spirituality of the West. Whoever is spiritually-minded must show a better, not necessarily a longer life."

Harijan, 7-9-1935

Mrs. Margaret Sanger

[When the question was raised as to what was to be done with couples who wanted to resist the impulse of sex and yet could not do so, Mrs. Sanger remarked that "sex-love is a relationship

which makes for oneness, for completeness between husband and wife and contributes to a finer understanding and a greater spiritual harmony." To this Gandhiji replied as follows:]

G.: When both want to satisfy animal passion without having to suffer the consequences of their act it is not love, it is lust. But if love is pure, it will transcend animal passion and will regulate itself. We have not had enough education of the passions. When a husband says, "Let us not have children, but let us have relations," what is that but animal passion? If they do not want to have more children, they should simply refuse to unite. Love becomes lust the moment you make it a means for the satisfaction of animal needs. It is just the same with food. If food is taken only for pleasure, it is lust. You do not take chocolates for the sake of satisfying your hunger. You take them for pleasure and then ask the doctor for an antidote. Perhaps you will tell the doctor that whisky befogs your brain and he gives you an antidote. Would it not be better not to take chocolates or whisky?

Mrs. S.: No. I do not accept the analogy.

G.: Of course you will not accept the analogy because you think this sex expression without desire for children is a need of the soul, a contention I do not endorse.

Mrs. S.: Yes, sex expression is a spiritual need and I claim that the quality of this expression is more important than the result, for, the quality of the relationship is there regardless of results. We all know that the great majority of children are born as an accident, without the parents having any desire for conceptions. Seldom are two people drawn together in the sex act by their desire to have children. . . . Do you think it possible for two people who are in love, who are happy together,

to regulate their sex act only once in two years, so that relationship would only take place when they wanted a child? Do you think it possible?

G.: I had the honour of doing that very thing and I am not the only one.

* * *

Must the sexual union take place only three or four times in an entire lifetime?" she asked.

"Why should people not be taught," replied Gandhiji, "that it is immoral to have more than three or four children and that after they have had that number they should sleep separately? If they are taught this, it would harden into custom. And if social reforms cannot impress this idea upon the people, why not a law? If husband and wife have four children, they would have had sufficient animal enjoyment. Their love may then be lifted to a higher plane. Their bodies have met. After they have had the children they wanted, their love transforms itself into a spiritual relationship. If these children die and they want more, then they may meet again. Why must people be slaves of this passion when they are not of others? When you give them education in birth-control, you tell them it is a duty. You say to them that if they do not do this thing, they will interrupt their spiritual evolution. You do not even talk of regulation. After giving them education in birth-control you do not say to them 'thus far and no further'. You ask people to drink temperately, as though it was possible to remain temperate. I know these temperate people."

Harijan, 25-1-1936

Mrs. Sanger's Profound Error

[Gandhji subsequently wrote as follows regarding Mrs. Sanger:]

. . . birth-control by contraceptives and the like is a profound error. I write thus with a full sense of my responsibility. I have great regard for Mrs. Margaret Sanger and her followers. She impressed me much by her great zeal for her cause. I know that she has great sympathy for the women who suffer because they have to bear the burden of carrying and rearing unwanted children. I know also that this method of birth-control has the support of many Protestant divines, scientists, learned men and doctors, many of whom I have the honour of knowing personally and for whom I entertain high regard. But I should be false to my God who is Truth and nothing but Truth, if I concealed my belief from the reader or these great advocates of the method. Indeed, if I hid my belief, I should never discover my error—if my present belief is one. Moreover its declaration is due to those many men and women who accept my guidance and advice in many moral problems including this one concerning birth-control.

That birth requires to be regulated and controlled is common cause between me and the advocates of contraceptives and the like. The difficulty of control through self-restraint is not to be denied. Yet there is no other way of attaining the end if mankind is to fulfil its destiny. It is my innermost conviction that if the method under discussion gains universal acceptance, mankind will suffer moral deterioration. This I say in spite of the evidence to the contrary that is often produced by the advocates of the method.

I believe I have no superstition in me. Truth is not truth merely because it is ancient. Nor is it necessarily to be regarded with suspicion because it is ancient. There are some fundamentals of life which may not be

lightly given up because they are difficult of enforcement in one's life.

Birth-control through self-control is no doubt difficult. But no one has yet been known seriously to dispute its efficacy and even superiority over the use of contraceptives.

Then, I feel that the full acceptance of the implication of the injunction of the *shastras* as to the strictly confined use of the sexual act, makes the observance of self-control much easier than if one regards the act itself as a source of supreme enjoyment. The function of the organs of generation is merely to generate progeny obviously of the highest type possible for a married couple. This can and should only take place when both parties desire, not sexual union but progeny, which is the result of such union. Desire for such union, therefore, without the desire for progeny, must be considered unlawful and should be restrained.

Harijan, 14-3-1936

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SELF-RESTRAINT v. SELF-INDULGENCE

(Relations of the Sexes)

"I hold that a life of perfect continence in thought, speech and action is necessary for reaching spiritual perfection. But my purpose is to plead for Brahmacharya as a temporary necessity in the present stage of national evolution."

—GANDHIJI

* * *

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